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August 2, 2005

The Honorable Pierce R. Homer
Secretary of Transportation
Ninth Street Office Building
202 North 9th Street – 5th Floor
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Secretary Homer:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Public/Private Transportation Act proposals of Fluor-Transurban and Clark-Shirley for I-95/I-395. The 60-day comment period is quite brief for a proposal of this magnitude. We find that new information on the proposals continues to become available with each Advisory Panel Meeting. Also, coordinating a comprehensive review and response during Arlington County Board's summer meeting schedule was not possible. As a result, we can give you only preliminary comments, and hope that there are other opportunities for comment later.

The current express lanes along I-395 and I-95 are quite successful, especially during high-occupancy-vehicle (HOV) hours. Arlington supports improvements that include providing better access to travelers in low-occupancy vehicles who are willing to pay tolls, **if and only if** such improvements build on the current success of HOV travel. Guaranteed-free access for HOV and generous use of toll revenue to support transit throughout the corridor are two essential principles toward insuring that these improvements will build on today's success. If these two principles won't be met, it is our preference to maintain what's there, without tolls and with peak-period HOV incentive, along I-395, even if High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes are implemented along I-95.

To summarize our position on these proposals, please consider our two primary principles:

I. Guaranteed-Free HOV and Assurance of Service Level

HOV has been very successful in moving large numbers of people as well as a significant benefit to the region's air quality. Maintaining free HOV and a high level of service should be absolutely firm requirements of any future agreement. Arlington is pleased that both proposers have seemed willing to have HOV-only operations if necessary during certain hours, and have pointed to Level of Service C as the operating threshold, so it seems to be a matter of writing such requirements in the agreement(s).

II. Transit Compensation; Balanced Geographic Revenue/Investment

- As has occurred in the past (e.g., for the Shirley Highway Bus-on-Freeway Demonstration), it is important that transit providers be reimbursed for any revenue foregone because of the toll/LOV feature of these proposals.
- Both proposers recommend using toll revenue to fund transit and commuter parking along the I-95 corridor, but nothing is specified for the transit systems that focus their service along I-395. If the mileage of I-395 is part of the toll calculation, the transit systems in the corridor inside I-495 need to have a proportional and firmly-specified portion of the toll revenue that goes to transit. Plainly speaking, the vast majority of the investment appears to be in the south end of the corridor to extend lanes south of VA 234 and for transit there, while the revenue to do so appears to come from throughout the corridor. There needs to be a broader distribution of the revenue, clearly-specified and guaranteed, for the north end of the corridor. Otherwise, similar to the original Clark-Shirley proposal, I-395 needs to be excluded and perhaps considered separately later.
- Simply buying more VRE cars won't increase commuter rail capacity. A number of other factors are involved and would need to be addressed. The Clark-Shirley proposal to purchase additional VRE cars would come at an additional expense to Arlington and all local governments because there would be a corresponding need for locomotives, parking and maintenance. If this transit benefit is pursued Arlington requests that VDOT account for these costs in any future agreement.

In addition, please consider the six additional points that are outlined below:

III. Reinstate the HOV Incentive North of the Pentagon

Arlington favors reinstating the HOV incentive between the Pentagon and Potomac River at least in the peak flow direction, and possibly also in the contra flow direction. As outlined in the Fluor proposal, Arlington is in favor of coordinating the findings and recommendations of the upcoming Environmental Impact Statement for the 14th Street Bridge with any future plans for HOT lanes in this corridor.

IV. Increase Capacity and Improve Flow at the Eads Street Exit

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has recognized that this intersection is at capacity and throughput/flow improvements at this location are needed. Arlington supports efforts to address traffic operations at the Eads Street exit and vicinity.

V. Better Connections To/From Crystal City and Potomac Yard

Arlington supports Fluor's proposal to provide additional HOV/HOT lane access to Jefferson Davis Highway (U.S. 1 and VA 110) in order to provide better transit and vehicular access to Crystal City and Potomac Yard. These growing economic, recreational and housing centers will benefit from improved access to the express lanes on I-395.

VI. Noise Walls

Arlington neighborhoods are concerned about current I-395 noise levels. With the addition of a third express lane it is appropriate to consider noise mitigation.

VII. Provide Ramp Connections at Shirlington to and from the South

Presently, other than a southbound entrance from the general-purpose lanes to the express lanes near Edsall Road, there are no northbound exits from the I-395 express lanes or southbound entrances between the Pentagon area and I-495. As such, the HOV incentive is not very useful for travelers to employment centers along I-395 anywhere between I-495 and the Pentagon. While finding adequate space to construct the necessary ramp(s) to accommodate this commuting pattern would be an engineering challenge due to the lack of right of way at this location, travelers to and from the growing economic, housing and recreational centers at Shirlington and Nauck would benefit from this addition. In addition to ramps at Shirlington, Arlington supports the Clark-Shirley-proposed feature to add a northbound exit ramp from the express lanes to the general-purpose lanes, to complement the existing southbound entrance ramp.

VIII. Bus Rapid Transit Facility at Shirlington

Arlington is pleased that the Fluor-Transurban proposal calls for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in the corridor. Investing in transit facilities at this location and an associated BRT facility would leverage existing investments while also benefiting both the region and Shirlington.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to comment on the I-95/I-395 HOT Lane proposals. We hope to provide further input as additional information becomes available and the process moves forward with the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority and the Advisory Panel. I am pleased to send a copy to this letter to the Chairmen of both, and am requesting that they please share it with their members.

Sincerely,

Signature on file @ VDOT

Christopher Zimmerman
Vice Chairman

- c: The Honorable John A. Rollison III, Chairman, Advisory Panel for I-95/395 PPTA
The Honorable David F. Snyder, Chairman, Northern Virginia Transportation Authority
Richard A. White, General Manager, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Richard K. Taube, Executive Director, Northern Virginia Transportation Commission